



Association of Michigan School Counselors

**Comments on House Bills 4030 and 4132, Bills to Raise Age of Compulsory
School Attendance
Before the Senate Education Committee
February 11, 2009**

Representative Melton and Members of the House Education Committee:

The Association of Michigan School Counselors (AMSC) provides leadership and support for the profession of counseling in K-12 education through advocacy and professional development, and represents over 700 school counselors statewide.

AMSC strives to support and enhance the practice of counseling in elementary through high school settings, to promote ethical and responsible professional practice, and to promote communication and exchange among school counselors.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 3030 and 4132, legislation which would raise the age of compulsory school attendance from 16 to 18. While AMSC supports the bills in principle, it raises numerous practical concerns – not all of which have immediate solutions.

There has been a great deal of debate recently regarding the link between post secondary education and economic growth in Michigan. AMSC supports recent efforts, including the Michigan Merit Curriculum, to establish a new standard of education that extends beyond high school and includes all post-secondary options. AMSC agrees in principle that changing the state's compulsory age for school attendance is a necessary link to this outcome.

However, making such a change without addressing implementation issues such as enforcement or access to guidance and counseling services, as well as other services proven to help students complete high school, is unlikely to result in greater numbers of students completing high school. For example:

Resources for Enforcement: schools will need additional resources for monitoring and enforcement, as will prosecutors and the courts.

Phased-in application: there are an estimated 30,000 dropouts in the state at this time. We don't see the state having the resources to bring those young people *back* into school. There are however, other strategies for reaching these students including restoration of funding for adult education (see detail below).

Resources for Guidance and Counseling Services, and Other Intervention Programs: currently in our state, students have inadequate access to school

counseling services. The American School Counselor Association recommends a 250-to-1 ratio of students to counselors, K - 12, while the Michigan Department of Education policy recommends a ratio of 400 to 1 in elementary schools and 350 to 1 in secondary schools.

Data from 2006 indicates that Michigan's current ratio of students to school counselors is approximately 628 to 1; more than double the recommended ratio. While an improvement from the 1997 ratio which was 1:709, this still represents a major barrier to providing effective guidance and counseling services, especially the individual work with a student on post-secondary planning.

Access to these services have been shown to influence high school drop out rates. For example, The School Dropout Assistance Program (1991-1996) funded a number of projects to test and evaluate the effect of promising strategies for dropout prevention and reentry. The results found that counseling services were one of the key elements of any particular dropout prevention initiative (*Lapan, R; Gyshers, N. & Sun, Y (1997) The Impact of More Fully Implemented Guidance Programs on the School Experiences of High School Students: A Statewide Evaluation Study Journal of Counseling and Development 75(4) 292-302*).

Restore Funding for Adult Education: AMSC appreciates the inclusion of alternatives to the traditional high school environment. Still, funding for one of the most important of these alternatives, Adult Education, has been severely reduced over recent years. Adult Education received approximately \$400 million in state funding in the early to mid-90's, and now receives only \$20 million. These programs and other alternatives will need to be expanded, in order to achieve the goals of HB 4030 and 4132.

These are just a few of the implementation issues raised by the legislation. Again, AMSC applauds the sponsor's intent, and is committed to working with Representatives Melton, Geiss and Lemmons, to ensure successful completion of high school and post-secondary education for all students. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. AMSC may be reached through our governmental consultants at Capitol Services, Inc. at (517) 372-0860.